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Territorial control and the scope and resilience of cannabis and other illegal drug crop cultivation

Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy

1 Illegal drug crop cultivation is a highly geographical issue since it is, as any other agricultural activity, a spatial phenomenon with obvious territorial dimensions. As such, the extent of illegally cultivated areas in a given country is directly linked to the degree of – or lack of, for that matter – politico-territorial control exerted by the state and its apparatus. Whether cannabis, coca bushes or opium poppies are concerned, drug crop cultivation can only be illegally undertaken and carried out on a large commercial scale in very specific politico-territorial settings. Illegal drug crops are of course cultivated by individual farmers and farming communities for various economic reasons (lack of resources, food insecurity, lack of or limited access to markets, *etc.*), which have been described and analysed at length in other publications, but this article focuses on what makes drug crop cultivation possible in certain countries despite its illegality.

2 Here the research question is not why farmers illegally cultivate drug crops but why they can do so in spite of it being illegal, that is, is spite of the laws, policies, and actions of the concerned states. In this regard, one can say that the territory is a central issue of illegal drug crop cultivation (Chouvy, 2002) and this paper therefore looks at how the various degrees and types of politico-territorial control exerted by states and their apparatuses explain the existence and the prolongation of illegal drugs cultivation in certain countries or territories.

3 Having worked for decades on illegal opium poppy cultivation in Asia, over the past few years I have started comparing the contexts and drivers of illegal poppy cultivation with those of illegal cannabis cultivation, predominantly in Morocco but also in India and in the United States of America. Comparing illegal cannabis and opium poppy cultivation in very different countries within and outside of Asia proved valuable not only because comparative analyses are always beneficial to the understanding of

complex phenomena but also because different illegal drug crops (cannabis, coca, opium poppies) are most often studied independently from one another. Therefore, taking opium poppy cultivation into consideration instead of focusing only on cannabis raises questions that would otherwise be ignored.

4 I first included cannabis cultivation in my research in 2004 when I briefly compared (Chouvy, 2004) Afghanistan and Morocco, two Muslim countries where the king is (was in Afghanistan's case) *Amir al-Mu'minin* (Commander of the Faithful), where the area of arable land is similar, where the cultivated areas in poppy (Afghanistan in 2004) and cannabis (Morocco in 2003) were equivalent (slightly above 130,000 hectares), and that later (2012) became known as the world's two foremost hashish producers. As a consequence, this article delves on various case studies from Asia, North Africa and North America (where I have conducted empiric field work) but doesn't draw on Latin America's realities and on coca cultivation/production (no empiric data of my own in that region of the world), although similar research questions and explanations most likely apply (given that cannabis, coca, and opium poppies are all cultivated illegally in Latin America).

5 While armed conflicts cannot, on their own or in all cases, fully explain the emergence of illegal agricultural drug industries, they are often and rightly mentioned amongst the foremost factors that lie behind the spread or the sustainability of illegal drug crops, (McCoy, 1991; Labrousse and Koutouzis, 1996; Chouvy, 2002; Labrousse, 2004). Admittedly, the outbreak or the prolongation of armed conflicts in countries or regions already home to illegal drug crop cultivation considerably increases the chances of expanding existing drug crop areas (Chouvy and Laniel, 2007). Indeed, in Afghanistan and in Burma (now also known as Myanmar) long and costly armed conflicts have led to the growth of illegal opium production, notably because the drug economies in each country contributed, to some extent at least, to the funding of their respective wars (Chouvy, 2009). And this is all the more so since their wars, in their many forms and dimensions, have been prolonged to the point of never ending, as if opium production and war were self-sustaining. Whether in Afghanistan or in Burma, the political fragmentation of both state and non-state actors involved in the armed conflicts further drove the recourse to thriving drug economies that ended up motivating at least some of the belligerents (Chouvy, 2002).

6 While there are cases, such as in Morocco, where illegal drug crop cultivation (cannabis) is a historical heritage of distant wars (the 1920s Rif War), there are of course also cases where large-scale commercial illegal drug crops have developed outside of war or armed conflicts, as evidenced by the United States (indoor but also vast outdoor cannabis cultivation) and India (both outdoor cannabis and opium poppy cultivation) (Chouvy, 2008; 2014; 2015). The case of the United States is most interesting for it actually invalidates two of the most often cited causal explanations of illegal drug crop cultivation: war and underdevelopment (along with so-called failed states, overt corruption, *etc.*). In truth, the fact that there exists a large but not absolute correlation between underdevelopment (or poverty or unemployment outside of the so-called Global South, such as in the United States) and illegal drug crop cultivation, which is comparable to the correlation between agricultural drug economies and war economies, does not seem to be a convincing explanatory factor in itself. Indeed, here correlation is clearly not causation or else there would be a much larger number of

countries (at war and, or, poverty-stricken) concerned by large-scale illegal drug crop cultivation.

7 Yet, one can reasonably estimate that most of the world's cannabis, coca, and opium poppy growers (peasant farmers or not: see below about the United States and Morocco) resort to the drug economy, out of need, that is, to cope with either poverty (most often, the resource poor in Afghanistan, Burma, Morocco, *etc.*, who have to cope with food deficits and/or the lack of other viable cash crops) or structural unemployment (out-of-work individuals or families in the United States, European countries, Morocco, etc.). There is also, of course, a minority of growers and/or land owners that clearly opts for drug crops out of economic opportunity, as a form of capitalism (some would say greed) (Chouvy, 2009).

8 Also, the large ecological flexibility of the cannabis plant, and in particular the fact that greenhouse and hydroponic growing can be and are largely resorted to, partly explains, along with the global development of a cannabis subculture, the phenomenon that is increasingly taking place in the United States, Canada and Western Europe. Yet, the opium poppy, unlike the coca bush, can also be grown in some of the most diverse parts of the world, due to its large adaptability to very different climatic and edaphic conditions. As a result, legal and illegal opium poppy cultivation is actually found across varied climates in Asia, the Americas, Europe, and even Africa (Chouvy, 2002). However, to the difference of cannabis, whose cultivation and consumption has benefited from a decades-long and quasi-global subculture, the opium poppy is not illegally cultivated on a commercial scale in the Western World (only pharmaceutical opiates are produced) or even in Africa.

9 In the end, it seems that, in the current context of the global prohibition regime of *certain* drugs and the war on drugs that accompanies it, the occurrence of largescale illegal drug crop cultivation in very diverse countries can be partly explained according to various types (and levels) of politico-territorial control deficit, whether such deficits proceed from corruption, lack of physical or financial means, conflictual and often violent relations between state and non-state actors (or sometimes between opposed state actors), or tacit agreements akin to realpolitik, again between state actors and non-state actors (in which case tacit agreements, such as in Morocco, serve to preserve a certain level of politico-territorial control by the state, and, as a consequence, social and political stability). While a lack of politico-territorial control is never the cause of illegal drug crop cultivation, it can clearly ease the onset and development of an illegal drug industry and one can safely say that such a sufficient level of control deficit is necessary for cannabis, coca or opium poppy crops to be illegally cultivated on large commercial scales against the laws and willpower of concerned states.

Illegal drug crop cultivation and types of politico-territorial control deficit

10 This paper challenges the assumption that illegal drug crop cultivation is necessarily an indicator of failed development and state weakness (as exemplified by the case of the United States). Still, weak politico-territorial control, failed development and state weakness/failure can clearly play crucial roles in enabling or even stimulating the development of illegal drug industries. In fact, territorialisation processes are always complex, fluctuating and often contradictory. This is especially the case in drug-

producing areas where multiple ongoing territorial dynamics take place, notably by way of power rivalries over space: in such cases, space control and territorial construction or competition can occur *through* drug production (when the control of illegal drug production enables or facilitates, if only financially, territorial control: northeast India, Morocco), *for* drug production (control of prime agricultural lands or even non-arable lands, such as deserts, turned into arable lands: some areas of Afghanistan and Burma), or, of course, *against* drug production (when the state or even some non-state actors are opposed to drug production: United States) (Chouvy, 2002).

11 In other words, illegal drug economies, and especially illegal drug crop cultivation, can and actually most often do proceed from absent, weak, or insufficient politico-territorial control – whether imposed by, or negotiated with, non-state actors (war or armed conflicts, as well as poverty – individual, familial, regional, *etc.* – being a frequent catalyst or condition, without being necessarily a cause). Here, control is meant as the capacity of the state and its apparatus to exercise restraining influence over its territory and its population, that is, in our specific case, its capacity to forbid largescale drug crop cultivation as implied by state laws and international conventions. When corruption or realpolitik (tacit agreement between the state and parts of its population, as is the case in northeast India and in Morocco but clearly not in the United States) allow for illegal drug cultivation, it obviously and directly affects politico-territorial control (even, of course, if the state has to tolerate drug crops in order to politically control its territory and population) or, rather, the enforcement by the state of its written laws over its territory (law-enforcement capacity). In fact, it can be said that the toleration of illegal drug crops by the state amounts to *de facto* control of its territory when and where its enables social and political concord (as, again, in northeast India and Morocco) (Chouvy, 2014a; Chouvy and Afsahi, 2014).

12 Illegal economies can in turn underpin political settlements that shape processes of state formation or consolidation. After all, the illegal drug productions of Afghanistan and Burma, which can be initially understood as coping strategies in – and of – peripheral and marginalized regions and communities removed from the states' political centres[1], have eventually and gradually enabled (or provoked) the territorial inclusion of the countries' margins by their respective states, along, notably, processes of economic integration (Shahrani, 1986; Ispahani, 1989; Chouvy, 2002). As Mahnaz Ispahani explains about Southwest Asia's borderlands, "Whereas states cannot come into existence without the ability to deny access, they cannot be physically consolidated and politically sustained without the ability to expand access - without the extension of the authority and the legitimacy of the center to the peripheries" (Ispahani, 1989, p. 7).

13 Indeed, in Asia's most important "opium territories", that is, in the so-called Golden Triangle and Golden Crescent areas, the individual and collective strategies of the various drug entrepreneurs have ended up being means of integration into regional and global economic and political games, as well as the means of economic and political circumvention of what have basically long been centrifugal state policies. Peripheries and, or, margins (in Afghanistan, unlike in Burma, opium poppy cultivation is far from being only relegated to border areas or even to mountainous areas) and their actors have eventually turned such centrifugal policies into centripetal dynamics, notably by transforming from peripheries or margins into centres (it is in the most remote peripheries of Burma, Laos, and Thailand, far away from the region's political centres

and capitals, that the centre(s) of the Golden Triangle emerged). Peripheries and margins can and sometimes do become centres of their own (Chouvy, 2002).

14 In the end, while politico-territorial control deficit is a *sine qua non* for illegal drug crop cultivation on large commercial scales, the reasons for such a deficit are as diverse as the considered countries. They are non-exclusive and include armed conflicts, corruption, political bargaining and other domestic or foreign realpolitik, lack of human, economic or material resources, territorial vastness, *etc.* Clearly, the fact that largescale illegal drug crop cultivation takes place in a given country implies that either the state or parts of its apparatus are actively involved in drug production, or that the state and its authorities do not control (enough to enforce the state's laws), for whatever reasons, the entire territory that is under their jurisdiction and nominal control.

15 The first case scenario, that of a state that would be actively engaged in illegal drug production, is paradoxical since it has a name of its own (narco-state) that has become extremely common despite a pervasive lack of definition and, even more so, despite the fact that, as I have argued elsewhere, there are no such things as narco-states (Chouvy, 2016). The three most pertinent criteria by which to judge whether a given country would qualify as a narco-state, provided it exists at all, would be: the absolute and relative surface area covered by illegal drug crops; the size of the illegal drug economy relative to the overall economy and, most importantly, the state-sponsorship of illegal drug production and/or trafficking.

16 Contrary to what most definition attempts have described, the ideal narco-state would be the opposite of a state whose institutions have been penetrated by drug trafficking organizations or of a state whose officials have been corrupted by drug money. A state cannot qualify as a narco-state unless illegal drug production and/or trafficking are/is the result of top-down economics where the state developed, if not initiated, an illegal drug industry. For a state to be rightly categorized as a narco-state, the illegal drug industry would have to be sponsored by the state and should contribute to the majority of a country's overall economy.

17 According to such a definition, neither North Korea nor Afghanistan, arguably the world's two most drug-tainted economies, can be called narco-states. Indeed, in Afghanistan as well as in all illegal drug-producing countries, North Korea apart, the drug industry is developed through private extraction regimes or through joint extraction regimes that involve both rulers and private actors (Snyder, 2006; Goodhand, 2008). Only in North Korea, where the state is the closest to what a narco-state could supposedly consist of, has the illegal drug industry been developed through a public extraction regime, the state (and not only some state actors of government officials) reportedly coercing some farmers to produce opium rather than grain on parts of the state farms land they till (Hurst, 2005; Lankov, 2011; Perl, 2003).

18 That very specific case apart, most illegal drug-producing countries, and especially states at war, such Afghanistan, Burma or Colombia, are weak or failing states where non-state actors are too strong to be suppressed or ignored by the state. As Joel Migdal wrote, "there can be no understanding of state capabilities in the Third World without first comprehending the social structure of which states are only one part" (Migdal, 1988, p. 34). He further explained how "in circumstances of fragmented social control, the state has become an arena of accommodations", something that is echoed by the limited access order of Douglass C. North's natural state (Migdal, 1988, p. 264; North *et*

al., 2009). It therefore appears that weak, failed or natural states – where violence is limited by political manipulation of the economy and the subsequent creation of privileged interests (North *et al.*, 2009) – that cannot reign in their strongmen-turned-drug lords, and other powerful potentially anti-government non-state actors, cannot reasonably be called narco-states.

19 The second scenario, that of illegal drug crops permitted by a deficit of territorial control (imposed or negotiated), is much more relevant than that of the so-called narco-state since such national cases exist and abound. There can be said to be three different and non-exclusive types of politico-territorial control deficit. Firstly, there is the case of the state that disposes of all the necessary means of territorial control and that regards the fight against drugs as a non-negotiable principle, but that nevertheless finds itself incapable of fully and permanently controlling its own territory by effectively enforcing its laws (such is the case of the United States). Secondly, there is the state that holds the means of control required, in particular the coercive means, but that chooses to tolerate, to some extent, illegal drug crop cultivation on its territory as a consequence of a binding political and socio-economic context: here, the partial deficit, more than the lack, of politico-territorial control is determined by local realpolitik, and drug law enforcement is not a priority (such are the cases of Morocco and India). Thirdly, there is the state that is challenged by a significant degree of armed opposition and that lacks the means to effectively extend its writ over its entire territory: here, effectively opposing illegal drug crop cultivation is not materially possible (such are the cases of Afghanistan and Burma). The latter two cases are in general also those in which a significant degree of corruption by the authorities (that frequently participate in the protection racket of producers and traffickers) can diminish the effectiveness of the state's anti-drug policies and actions.

20 The aforementioned deficits in politico-territorial control obviously raise the question of the limits that exist between legality and illegality, between toleration and corruption, and between legitimacy and illegitimacy. The three politico-territorial conditions presented above in the second scenario as distinct types or subtypes (inherent state limitations, state toleration, and state powerlessness) are drawn from case studies presented in previous work and that cannot be reproduced here for lack of space (Chouvy, 2008; 2009; 2014a; 2014b; 2016; Chouvy and Afsahi, 2014)[2]. Their diversity shows in particular that large-scale illegal drug crop cultivation can be undertaken regardless of political regimes (democratic, dictatorial, monarchical) or of legislative or coercive apparatus (not even the most powerful). In the end, various types and levels of politico-territorial deficit can help explain various types and scales of illegal drug crop cultivation, depending on the politico-territorial contexts of course, but also, obviously, on physical geography.

Types of politico-territorial control deficit and cultivation patterns

21 The types and levels of politico-territorial control deficit can determine not only the scope of drug crop cultivation but also its spatial forms and dimensions. Conversely, the specific spatial forms taken by cannabis, coca and opium poppy cultivation end up reflecting the attitude of the considered states toward drug control and the means at their disposal or invested in their anti-drug actions. The size of the fields, whether they

are rain-fed or irrigated, their isolation or grouping into large areas devoted to illegal quasi monoculture, their concealment or not, their distance from roads, towns and even regional and national capitals, are among the many indications of a state's attitude toward illegal drug crop cultivation (or, of course, of its relation to the population involved in illegal cropping).

22 According to the William G. Hoskins a landscape is "both a record, a rich body of evidence about the past, and a problem to be investigated, a complex set of questions to be addressed" (Baker, 2010, p. 115). While landscapes can bear clues of a more or less distant past[3], they can also be read as an indication of how state and non-state actors have adapted and keep adapting to one another through mobility, change, and even conflict. Such clues can be found in observing what John Brinckerhoff Jackson has termed the political landscape (produced by the power) and the vernacular landscape (produced by the inhabitants) (Brinckerhoff Jackson, 1984). In most illegal drug crop cultivation areas, whether in the United States, in Morocco, in India, or in Afghanistan and in Burma, drug-crop landscapes tend to display more vernacular features ("where evidences of political organization of space are largely or entirely absent") than political features ("spaces and structures designed to impose or preserve a unity and order on the land, or in keeping with a long range, large-scale plan") (Brinckerhoff Jackson, 1984, p. 150). In these countries, the peripheries and margins, or simply the remote areas, being geographically distant from the political centres and their public facilities and infrastructures, are conducive to illegal drug crop cultivation (mountains, deserts, national forests and parks, border zones, *etc.*).

23 What landscape analysis can reveal about the politico-territorial control exerted by a given state is made obvious, for example, by the contrast that exists between the spatial forms taken by cannabis cultivation in the United States and in Morocco, two very different countries obviously, but two countries where illegal commercial outdoor cannabis cultivation is important, where most growers operate on small-scale "family farms", and where most of the labour is done by family members, and also neighbours and friends (especially in the United States during the harvest / trimming season when "trimmigrants[4]" are also needed). Both countries also have their share of growers who are not originally peasant farmers but have come back to their land ("back-to-the-landers" in the USA) or country ("Marocains de l'extérieur" ou "Marocains résidents à l'étranger" (MRE) in Morocco): out-of-work construction workers (Moroccans coming back from Spain), coal miners (Kentucky) or loggers and fishermen (California's Emerald Triangle) (Meisel, 2017)[5].

24 Beside these similarities, cultivation and production techniques differ very much in both countries, not only because the United States produces marijuana and Morocco produces hashish, but also because the cannabis landscapes are radically different. In Morocco, cannabis cultivation is undertaken over entire valleys and slopes. It extends along *wadi* beds and even runs along some of the Rif's main roads, in full view (although some fields happen to be somehow dissimulated behind rows of corn) despite its illegality and partly because of the tacit agreement and/or corruption of the authorities. On the opposite, in the United States, when cannabis is not cultivated indoor (including in greenhouses), it is usually grown out of sight, carefully hidden on public land or in third-party agricultural fields. Either way, cultivation is concealed and carried out on lands that usually do not belong to the growers so that they can avoid having their land and property seized by the authorities under the Asset Forfeiture

Programme. Cannabis fields have increasingly been cultivated in federal forests, where fields are often booby-trapped to protect the crops from the authorities but also from harvest thieves. In the Midwest (America's corn belt) cannabis fields are often concealed, as is sometimes the case in Morocco, in the middle of cornfields that belong to unsuspicious third-party famers (although in Morocco cannabis and corn would belong to the same farmer).

25 Despite a steady and significant increase in its human and financial means since its inception in 1973, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the US counter-narcotics law enforcement federal agency, has never been able to reduce either illegal cannabis cultivation or the number of methamphetamine laboratories, much less drug trafficking in general. Toleration is as evident in Morocco as repression is in the United States, "where researchers have characterized these growers as committing crimes of resistance and accommodation against those perpetrating the exploitation of their labor and environment" (August, 2012, p. 21). The fact remains that cannabis cultivation exists in both countries over vast and comparable areas (reportedly 47,500 ha in Morocco in 2012 and 44,000 ha in the US outdoors only, in 2009), despite its illegality and in part because of the absence (Rif) or the collapse (California, Kentucky) of agriculture-based economies and resource-intensive industries (logging, mining or fishing) (UNODC, 2013; HIDTA, 2010; August, 2012, p. 22).

26 In the radically different Afghan context opium poppies are cultivated over vast areas (201,000 ha in 2016, according to the UNODC), often covering entire valleys, in a proximity to main roads that depends on the local presence and power of the state. The fact that poppy cultivation (and also, increasingly, cannabis cultivation) is so widespread (even if it concerns only about two per cent of Afghan arable lands) and that it is overwhelmingly carried out in plain view attests to the weakness and even, of course, to the corruption of some of the state agencies and agents, which sometimes simply cannot establish the authority of the state in provinces or districts controlled to various degrees by anti-government insurgents. In Afghanistan, as well as in Burma, the armed contestation that takes place in parts of the national territory makes large-scale illegal opium production feasible, whether by non-state armed groups, by some of the poorest rural populations, or by well-connected and powerful landlords who can play their part in the corruption that undermines otherwise limited antidrug policies and actions. The valleys and plains of southern Afghanistan, some of which are covered with irrigated poppy fields, contrast of course with the multitude of much smaller and much more discrete swidden fields that dot the mountainous slopes of northeastern Burma (where the valley bottoms can also occasionally be covered with poppies). In both cases, the weakness and/or corruption of the authorities is readable in the landscape.

27 The same is true of Arunachal Pradesh, India, where state toleration is high but where the mountainous terrain dictates the spatial and altitudinal distribution of poppy fields, from the large plots of land that can be found in the vast flood plains (often on large and poorly accessible silt-rich river islands exposed during low-water periods) to the smaller swidden fields found on even less accessible mountain slopes. Only topography, therefore, blurs the maps of the spatial forms taken by illegal drug crop cultivation and of their political-territorial significance (Chouvy, 2009; 2014).

28 Obviously, and as stressed by geographer Joseph J. Hobbs, "drug landscapes are no ordinary landscapes" (Hobbes, 2004, p. 301). They "either are or are meant to be hidden

landscapes, concealed in sometimes unique and creative ways", as exemplified by the "series of elaborate environmental interventions" mentioned by James H. Mills about cannabis cultivation in nineteenth century India: "In seeking to use these landscapes in surreptitious ways they transformed them imaginatively, as they began to look at their local environments in novel ways for the new purpose of avoiding the state's planned intervention" (Mills, 2004, p. 226).

Politico-territorial control, (il)legality, (il)licitness, and (il)legitimacy

29 When lack or deficit of politico-territorial control is important enough to make large-scale illegal drug crop cultivation possible, it obviously raises questions about how illegality can be decreed by a state and about how illegality can nevertheless be adopted by non-state actors but also by certain state actors. In most cases, the illegality of drug crop cultivation and even of the drug trade actually raises issues of legitimacy and compatibility: illegality of an economic activity often deemed legitimate by those who undertake it, and subsequent incompatibility between legal categories. This is notably the consequence of the slow construction of political-territorial control by modern states that, according to the "Westphalian" ideal type model that underlies nation-states, imposes, not without difficulties, a unitary national law not only over various preexisting, and sometimes contradictory, customary laws, but also over a territory bound by modern borders that replace traditional frontier zones.

30 A border, through its definition and its delimitation processes, modifies the very nature of any traditional trading that preceded its imposition. In fact, the activities suddenly termed smuggling or trafficking are often nothing else than traditional trading turned illegal or traditional goods turned illegal. As Christopher Tomlins aptly stresses: "Legalities generate illegalities, for the two are necessary conditions of each other's existence. Law, after all, makes outlaws, not law's absence. Their cheek-by-jowl intimacy, in fact, helps explain how easily, and frequently, legality and illegality trade places » (Tomlins, 2001, p. 3). For example, "what is now called smuggling was normal among the Pashtun nomads of eastern Afghanistan for many generations" (Canfield, 1986, p. 97). Between Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as between Burma and Thailand, imposed boundaries cut through frontier zones and tribal land, changing frontiers into borders and creating *de facto* jurisdictions F9 2D in effect, bounded legal territories. But boundaries also affect the very nature or existence of trading routes, as "a road through tribal territory is much more than an avenue of mobility" and as borders and state's legislation eventually imply that "the laws of the state intersect with the laws of the tribe" (Ispahani, 1989, p. 141).

31 As Lord Curzon, Governor General and Viceroy of India (1899-1905), remarked, "the earliest frontiers [actually referring to borders] 'erected a barrier or created a gap', that is, restricted movement and access" (Ispahani, 1989, p. 3). What was true in the borderlands of Southwest Asia, and for its borderlanders, can also be observed in the frontier area that stretched between Burma and Siam in the 19th century. The frontier was then said to be "golden, silver paths, free for traders" and "the tribal people wandering in the mountain forests were subjects of no power" (Thongchai, 1994, p. 73). Borders were then far from being boundaries: they were frontiers. Lord Curzon depicted this "widely diffused type of ancient Frontier" that was that of "the

intermediary or Neutral Zone": "This may be described as a Frontier of separation in place of contact, a line whose distinguishing feature is that it possesses breadth as well as length"[6].

32 Boundaries eventually cut through transfrontier routes and altered the Southeast Asian frontiers from areas linking polities into areas separating polities (Chouvy, 2002). Colonialism and, later, the rise of "nation-states", required having boundary lines clearly demarcated: "The major principle behind the Asian frontier system was recognition of the desirability of avoiding direct contact between the administered territories of the various colonial empires concerned" (Lamb, 1968, p. 62-63). In Asia, where the power over individuals was traditionally separated from the power over land, since a subject was bound first and foremost to his lord rather than to a state, modern boundaries have "violently and arbitrarily" divided "ethnic peoples into different nationals" (Thongchai, 1994, p. 164). Hence, the 'external', or alien, may not really be external "while the 'internal' can be made alien or external" as various tribal or refugee people can still experience in Thailand, where many have spent decades waiting for Thai citizenship and thus have never "belonged" to any state or nation (Thongchai, 1994, p. 170).

33 Politico-territorial control and ways of exerting it have been deeply affected, first by colonialism, then by the emergence of nation-states and the imposition of their national laws and their "international" borders. Drug production and trade were obviously amongst the activities affected as the colonial powers happened to encourage and even sometimes coerce farmers into drug crop cultivation especially in peripheral and/or marginal areas. This is clearly what happened in northeast India whose long geographic and political isolation is a clear explanatory factor of its (now illegal) opium production (Chouvy, 2014b).

34 In the same way that the opium and cannabis trades have not been illegal everywhere and at all times, cannabis cultivation (in Morocco or in India) and opium poppy cultivation (in Afghanistan or in India) have not always been prohibited, depending on time and location and the evolutions of international law (the international prohibition slowly developed starting in 1906) and national laws (all the aforementioned countries issued various prohibition edicts). This actually further complicates things for states as consumptions habits and traditions inherited from more or less distant pasts, and still in existence to various degrees in local cultures, make drug law enforcement and broader politico-territorial control all the more delicate and difficult. This is especially the case when drug crop cultivation, but also drug trade and consumption, have been declared illegal under state laws but remain perceived as legitimate by parts of the populations. This was the case, for example, when the 1957 Afghan prohibition of opium was enforced in Badakhshan province (and only there), where opium production was historical and had long been legal. As James Bradford explains, the opium ban in Badakhshan was perceived by the population as "an intrusive and coercive cultural policy" that "exacerbated deeply rooted sentiments that government policy was overtly pro-Pashtun", thereby "ultimately fragmenting and already fractures state-society relationship" (Bradford, 2015, p. 225-226).

35 Therefore, it is important to distinguish, following Itty Abraham and Willem van Schendel, between what is legal and what is licit, that is, between what "states consider to be legitimate ("legal")" and what people "consider to be legitimate ("licit")" (Abraham and van Schendel, 2005, p. 4). The advantage of this distinction is that it

allows an approach to legality and illegality that is not binary and, above all, not based solely on state-centred conceptions. As the authors rightly stress, "the state's claim to a monopoly of regulated predation and redistribution of proceeds (*i.e.*, taxation and state expenditure) is based on the delegitimization of other forms of predation that are constructed as robbery, piracy, fraud, warlordism, or racketeering. But, historically, the boundary of illicitness has shifted back and forth as bandits helped make states and states made bandits" (Abraham and van Schendel, 2005, p. 7). This is what Kathryn Meyer and Terry Parssinen remind us of when they write that it was in "the hothouse created by China's disintegration and the League's successes, that gangsters and politicians molded the modern international narcotics trafficking industry". As a consequence, they explain that "the symbiotic relationship between trafficker and politician that has become the dominant feature of the contemporary drug trade has its roots in Asia in the early twentieth century" (Meyer and Parssinen, 1998, p. 12). In fact, beyond such symbiotic relationships it appears that in most major illegal drug producing countries, and as Kathleen Frydl has stated, drug control sometimes becomes "a valued tool of statecraft", one that can, eventually, develop "into less of a specific mission and more of a modality, a way to exercise state power" (Frydl, 2013, p. 25).

36 Whether traditional opium consumption in Iran, religious cannabis consumption in India, or modern "recreational" cannabis consumption in the United States is concerned, the people and communities involved in what is basically illegal drug production, trade and consumption "defy the norms and rules of formal political authority" because they find their illegal activities to be acceptable and legitimate (Abraham and van Schendel, 2005, p. 4). Therefore, illegal drug crop cultivation reveals the contradictory relations that different and opposed actors have to legality and illegality. While drug crop cultivation is prohibited under international law and most national laws, drug production for non-pharmaceutical uses is widely perceived as legitimate, some will say licit, by producers and consumers alike. Indeed, Abraham and van Schendel explain: "Legal restrictions often come up against socially sanctioned practices, and while this may have the effect of driving these practices into the sphere of criminality, it does not eliminate them nor does it necessarily force them into hiding" (Abraham and van Schendel, 2005, p. 19). This helps to understand why the debates on the legitimacy of drugs illegality have multiplied worldwide in the past decade and especially in the United States (where a few states have legalized cannabis production and consumption), in Latin America (where the failure and the costs of the prohibition and its associated war on drugs have been denounced by several heads of states), or in Morocco (where the illegality of the cannabis industry has been discussed in parliament).

37 The inherent and necessary limitations of the politico-territorial control exerted by the states, whatever their political regimes and the means at their disposal, are made obvious by the dimensions and various spatial forms taken by illegal drug crop cultivation. It is ultimately the territory that lies at the very centre of the illegal drug crop cultivation issue, being the theater of the many rivalries, the often duplicitous games and the many interrelations that take place between societies, states and their apparatuses. Complete politico-territorial control is of course impossible and as a consequence neither drug production and trafficking, nor drug consumption[7] are achievable goals. Between total repression, state toleration, corruption, and even the abandonment of a costly and ineffective war on drugs, the states and the societies

involved in the drug industry draw an ever-revised map of illegality. At the end of the day, and in spite of the battles that have been waged and sometimes won here and there, the impossibility of complete politico-territorial control, even by the most powerful, calls for the recognition that the war on drugs has long been lost (Chouvy, 2009).

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NOTES

1. Furthermore, in the “galactic” or “mandala” polities of Southeast Asia where frontier and border areas were traditionally managed differently (Tambiah, 1976).
2. Texts available on www.geopium.org.
3. “The English landscape itself, to those who know how to read it aright, is the richest historical record we possess. There are discoveries to be made in it for which no written documents exist, or have ever existed” (Hoskins, 1955, p. 14).
4. Migrants whose labour is needed for the labour-intensive trimming of cannabis leaves.
5. In the United States, businessman growers (including the so-called “hustler growers”) are a minority and subsistence farmers a majority: “back-to-the-landers”, “pragmatists” and “communal growers” in California for example, and “low-lifes” in Kentucky. The resort to

seasonal workers (Mexicans in California) only takes place on larger farms, mostly those of the businessman growers (August, 2012, p. 15-20).

6. Text of the 1907 Romanes Lecture on the subject of Frontiers by Lord Curzon of Kedleston, Viceroy of India (1898-1905) and British Foreign Secretary 1919-24): Website of The International Boundaries Research Unit (http://www-ibru.dur.ac.uk/docs/curzon1.html).

7. As the biologist and pharmacognosist Jean-Marie Pelt pointed out: "drug sticks to Man like the skin to his flesh" (Pelt, 1983, p. 14).

ABSTRACTS

As revealed by the examples of Morocco, northeast India, Afghanistan, Burma/Myanmar, and the United States of America, degrees of politico-territorial control or law-enforcement deficit by the state can explain, to some extent, the existence of large expanses of illegal drug cultivation. Causes of politico-territorial control deficit are many and non-exclusive. They include armed conflicts, corruption, loosely integrated territories, and lack of financial, human and material means of asserting state control. Large-scale illegal drug crop cultivation can take place according to three main scenarios: that of a full-fledged but inefficient war on drugs; that of toleration, for various motives, of illegal drug plant cultivation by the state (which can amount to negotiated but effective control); and that of the militarily-challenged state that cannot exert full control over its territory. The fact that total politico-territorial control by the state, no matter how powerful and resourceful, is deemed impossible, shows that the war on drugs is doomed to fail despite how many battles were won. Eventually, the very limits of the state's politico-territorial control, when applied to counter-narcotics and law enforcement, implicitly question the illegality of a practice that is considered legitimate by many.

INDEX

Keywords: Drug crop, territorial control, counter-narcotics, world, state

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